

Urban Tourism: Assessing the Impact of Political Murals on Visitors Along Bandung's Asia Africa Street

Banon Gilang Muhamad Kali Ichsan^{1*}, Andrea Abdul Rahman Azzqy², Citra Kemala Putri³

^{1,3}Universitas Informatika dan Bisnis Indonesia, Indonesia

²Universitas Budi Luhur, Indonesia

*Corresponding Author

Email: banongilang@unibi.ac.id

Abstract

Political murals along Jalan Asia Afrika in Bandung reveal a narrative void: there is no public art that explicitly commemorates the 1955 Asian-African Conference. This study examines three main aspects: (1) the existence of visual gaps found in cultural heritage areas. (2) How political murals influence perceptions, emotions, and intentions to revisit. (3) an integrated model for urban tourism that combines collaboration between policy makers, the arts community, an annual mural festival, and improvements in digital media. The qualitative-descriptive approach used involved comparative field studies in George Town (Penang), Lembur Katumbiri (Bandung), and Kali Code (Yogyakarta); two field observations with GIS mapping in four high-visibility corridors; in-depth interviews with the curator of the Asian-African Conference Museum and the mural community; focus groups with local artists; expert interviews on AR, projection mapping, and gamification; and an online perception survey (n = 150). Preliminary findings indicate the absence of KAA-themed murals, although community art interventions have increased visits by 35% and emotional connection by 78%. GIS outputs indicate four priority areas for an integrated mural program. Policy recommendations include formal partnerships between the KAA Museum, the Bandung City Government, and the art community; the implementation of an annual political mural festival; and the integration of AR/VR technology to promote educational impact.

Keywords: *Political Murals, Heritage Tourism, Visitor Perception, Geospatial Mapping, Cultural Diplomacy*

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary society, cities are not only spaces for habitation but also cultural stages where the public performance of history, identity, and diplomacy occurs. Murals are changing from being a mere decoration to a form of telling a story. Moreover, they are helping in developing civic pride and soft power too (Richards 2020). The language of diplomacy, once exclusively confined to embassies, has now shifted to the walls and streets. In other words, murals with a political theme are appearing on the walls, speaking different languages (Pramudita et al., 2024). So, let's look at some examples that illustrate this potential of public art in this way. Firstly, public art becomes a medium of "media in motion" that brings cultural dialogue into everyday life. Making heritage tourism an intercultural exchange space.

This trend is visible worldwide. The murals that highlight multiculturalism in George Town, Penang, which are done by the authorities, attract millions of visitors each year as well as sustain businesses (García, 2021). In Medellín, Colombia, conflict-affected areas are being painted over by political murals through community-led activities to become living galleries for the public and visitors. Studies suggest that murals used in tourism strategies can help cities to recover their lost histories, revitalize heritage districts, and enhance local community relationships (Hall & Du, 2021).

However, studies involving murals as explicit cultural diplomacy tools in Southeast Asia remain limited. Scholars have focused a lot more on the preservation of monuments rather than the interaction between visual dissent, civic engagement, and tourism in postcolonial settings (Dieck & Jung, 2018; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2022). At the same time, new storytelling modes are offered by digital culture. Murals can have augmented reality (AR) animations applied to them,

and projection mapping of historical events may also be possible, while mobile apps can gamify walking tours for the younger generation (Shin, 2021; Dieck et al., 2021). Mural diplomacy is now both digital and analog, creating immersive experiences and participatory routes. In Indonesia, Bandung's Jalan Asia Afrika is historically significant; it is the site of the Asia–Africa Conference in 1955. Gedung Merdeka, or the Merdeka Building, is a building that lies around Jalan Asia-Afrika, which is a symbol of solidarity. However, the streets that surround it do not reflect such a solidarity yet, but for everyday visitors, it does. Governance roadblocks, where the museum has curatorial authority but mural permits belong to the city government, have kept public walls dormant. On the other hand, the strong digital infrastructure and high penetration of smartphones in Bandung create opportunities to integrate interactive technologies in heritage tourism (Sutanto et al., 2021).

This creates both challenges and possibilities. Bandung should transform the blank facades along Asia Afrika Street into politically themed murals, recalling the themes of decolonization, non-alignment, and South–South solidarity, making it a living museum (Neves, 2023). Initiatives like these are in line with UNESCO's concept of "citizen diplomacy," where citizens, through the mere act of urbanity, promote peace (UNESCO, 2019). To be successful, though, they need an integrated approach that includes historical guidance from academics, streamlined municipal cooperation, community ownership, and partnerships with digital media innovators (Ha & Park, 2020). A research study studied the function of political murals in Bandung as cultural diplomacy and heritage tourism (Pinto & Guerra, 2023). It will ask three questions first by laying out the narrative gaps along Jalan Asia Afrika and how GIS mapping can help prioritize which corridor is of priority (Prykhodko et al., 2023). How do political murals shape visitor perception, emotional engagement, and the intention to revisit? (Goulding & McCroy, 2020). What partnerships can strengthen their role in tourism and development, for instance, institutional partnerships, annual mural festivals, and digital media?

To address these matters, researchers use a qualitative descriptive method with observation, GIS mapping, interviews, focus group discussions, expert consultation, and surveys. This study constructs a framework for a mural-based cultural diplomacy by comparing Bandung with George Town, Medellín, and Yogyakarta (Ahmed et al., 2024). In the end, it says that political murals are not just art things but tools of conversation, solidarity, and resistance in the city (McClinchey, 2023).

RESEARCH METHODS

This study used a qualitative-descriptive design to investigate this phenomenon. The design facilitated both a deep dive into stakeholder perspectives and practical guidance for heritage tourism development (Creswell et al., 2018; Braun & Clarke, 2019). The researchers generated data through comparative case studies, field observation with geospatial mapping, semi-structured interviews, a focus group discussion, an expert consultation, and an online perception survey. There was another comparative visual analysis about George Town of Penang, Lembur Katumbiri of Bandung, and Kali Code of Yogyakarta. The researchers took pictures of the murals at each site and sorted them by theme, style, and involvement. Expectation about how visitors would move their space, where they would cluster, and how they would collaborate (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2022)

By conducting field observations on Jalan Asia Afrika, researchers observed the condition of the walls, equipment, and the number of pedestrians using manual counters. We used a geo-tagging tool to map out each photo point and plotted it onto QGIS software for mapping the corridor. It found out 4 zones with a lot of activity, which are very suitable for applying murals, such as north of Gedung Merdeka, at Pos Pemuda Intersection, on Alun-alun Timur axis, and at

Taman Literasi Plaza (Buhalis & Amaranggana, 2015; Zheng et al., 2021). We interviewed eighteen people, including the curator of the Asia–Africa Conference Museum, officials from the municipal and tourism offices, community leaders, and ten visitors. The interviews went on for 45-60 minutes and dealt with the perceptions of public art, regulatory challenges, and visions for murals that activated heritage. The participants were purposefully recruited on the basis of their institutional role and direct engagement with mural practice (Bryman, 2016; Castillo-Montoya, 2016).

Six members of the Tembok Bomber mural collective participated in a focus group discussion about the community engagement they have been doing and the annual mural festival. The session was directed according to participatory placemaking concepts. A local AR developer was consulted to discuss the design requirements and production timelines for augmented reality overlays, projection mapping, and audio guides via QR codes. The results of this semi-structured expert interview were beneficial for providing design recommendations (Dieck et al., 2021). In the end, a perception survey was done online and circulated to 150 domestic and overseas visitors in Gedung Merdeka and the mural corridors that were identified. The survey tool in this research adapted items on visibility, historical understanding, emotional involvement, and revisit intention from past studies on tourism experience (Shin, 2017; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2022). The researcher processed the quantitative data using SPSS to create descriptive statistics. The result indicates that 35% of the respondents say the street art is the primary motivator to revisit the city. Meanwhile, 78% of the respondent's state that they gain a better emotional connection to Bandung's history after seeing the city's murals.

Table1. Methods Table

Method	Data Sources	Tools & Techniques	Analysis
Comparative Visual Analysis (Edwards & Griffin, 2013)	Murals at George Town; Lembur Katumbiri; Kali Code	High-res photography; literature review	Thematic content categorization
Field Observation & GIS Mapping (Buhalis & Amaranggana 2015)	Wall conditions; pedestrian counts; GPS coordinates	Manual counters, GPS device, QGIS	Corridor density and foot-traffic mapping
In-Depth Interviews (Snape & Spencer, 2003)	Museum KAA curator; 10 tourists; 8 stakeholders	Semi-structured interview guides; audio recording	Thematic content analysis
Focus Group Discussion (Iveson 2013)	6 Tembok Bomber mural collective members	Guided discussion; session transcription	Participatory thematic synthesis
Expert Interview (Dieck & Jung, 2018)	AR specialist (Lidya Permata Sari)	Video conferencing; screen sharing	Feasibility and design evaluation
Online Perception Survey (Buhalis & Amaranggana, 2015)	150 visitors at Gedung Merdeka and the corridors	Likert-scale questionnaire; SPSS	Descriptive statistics of awareness and engagement
Cross-Method Triangulation (Braun & Clarke, 2006)	Transcripts; GIS outputs; survey dataset	NVivo; QGIS; SPSS	Integrated thematic and statistical synthesis

The qualitative data obtained from the interviews, the focus group, and open-ended survey questions were all transcribed word-for-word and subject to thematic content analysis using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase approach. The use of spatial data visualizations in

QGIS and statistical summaries in SPSS provided for methodological triangulation that ensured robust data for mapping narrative gaps, analyzing visitors' feedback, and crafting a mural diplomacy framework

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Spatial Analysis of High-Visibility Corridors. We carried out a field survey using GPS technology to identify 4 zones along Jalan Asia Afrika where pedestrian numbers exceed 2000 per day (Table 2). Mural interventions can be most beneficial when placed in these high-visibility corridors to attract attention from a local and tourist audience.

Table 2. Daily Pedestrian Counts by Corridor

Corridor Location	Avg Daily Pedestrians
North of Gedung Merdeka	2,450
Pos Pemuda Intersection	2,100
Alun-alun Timur Axis	2,350
Taman Literasi Plaza	2,200

After tracing existing community murals onto this spatial framework, it became clear that none of the murals engage with the themes of solidarity or non-alignment from 1955. On the other hand, the local murals often emphasize the importance of the environment and social justice. It leaves a narrative gap in the heritage landscape of Bandung.

Visitor Perceptions and Emotional Engagement

The results of an online survey (n = 150) revealed that 35% of respondents indicated street art as their main motivation for re-visiting the city of Bandung. In addition, 78% of respondents stated that looking at murals makes them feel more connected to the city's history. This is the case even with murals that have no relevance to the Asia–Africa Conference. (Table 3). Open-ended responses depict murals as “surprising historical guides” and “bridges between dusty archives and busy streets,” indicating a strong visitor appetite for ground-level interpretive cues.

Table 3. Survey Responses on Street Art Impact

Metric	Percentage
Street art motivates revisit intention	35 percent
Murals deepen historical/emotional connection	78 percent

Based on these findings, it can be stated that visual storytelling influences the behaviour of tourists by driving their behavior as well as affective engagement. This confirms creative-placemaking theories that show public art offers meaningful experiences to visitors.

Institutional Dynamics and Regulatory Challenges

After interviewing the curator of the Asia–Africa Conference Museum and Bandung City planning officers, a governance split was found to still exist. This then hinders mural development on a larger scale. At Gedung Merdeka, the museum has full curatorial rights, selecting exhibits, interpreting archival material, and organizing indoor programming. Artworks that are being displayed on the exterior wall along Jalan Asia Afrika must obtain a permission letter from at least three city councils. Those city councils include the Culture and Tourism Office, Heritage Preservation Office, and Public Works Office. Each department has its own application forms, technical standards, and timelines for review, which do not usually synchronize.

Artists tagged this fragmentation as a bureaucratic maze. One muralist said that they submitted six different permits, each containing a different architect's drawing, environmental impact statement, insurance certificate, and still got mixed messages. City planners said murals currently classed as “advertising” under the zoning code, not a heritage or cultural asset. As a result, very few proposals for murals related to the conference go beyond the draft stage, and many artists choose low-impact, temporary work. This misalignment not only suppresses creative aspirations but also undermines the potential of Jalan Asia Afrika as a cohesive heritage corridor. The street is not being maximally used to promote tourism in the city of Bandung, because there are no public art installations related to the 1955 conference. Our results underline the necessity for a unified approval system. This will ensure that there will be one portal that coordinates the attention of the curator, heritage, and civil works approval. Further, this would ensure that artists and cultural administrators can collaborate easily.

Table 4. Institutional Roles and Authority Gaps

Institution	Jurisdiction	Primary Function	Authority Gap
Asia–Africa Conference Museum	Interior exhibition spaces	Curate historical content, manage archives	Cannot authorize murals on public walls
Dept. of Culture and Tourism	Citywide cultural programs	Approve cultural events, allocate small grants	Limited support for permanent public art
Heritage Preservation Office	Protected heritage sites	Enforce conservation guidelines	Treat murals as non-heritage “advertising”
Public Works Department	Urban infrastructure	Permit structural modifications, signage	Separate review of facade interventions
Community Artists & Collectives	Mural design and execution	Create public art, engage local stakeholders	Frustrated by multi-layered permit requirements

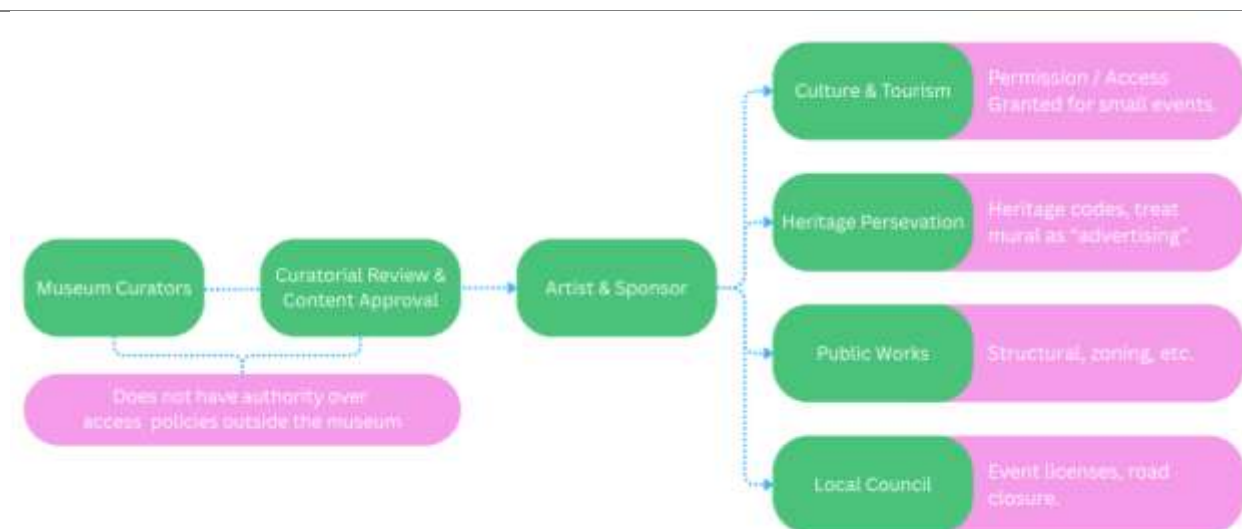


Figure 1. Fragmented approval pathways for external murals.

Community Perspectives on Festivalization

During our focus group with six members of the Tembok Bomber mural collective, the participants advocated for an annual “Asia–Africa Mural Festival” as a feasible solution to institutional sluggishness. The week-long event was planned for November, which also happened

to be the date of the conference. At this event, artists will make use of a blank canvas, i.e., a wall, to paint the narratives of the conference live. This also includes guided workshops and panel discussions.

Key festival features and artist insights included:

- **Live-painting as spectacle:** A method that incorporates some scaffolding to enable the public to witness the making of murals turns them into performative acts that make the artwork in common ownership while drawing media attention. This was the learning from reconciliation mural projects from Latin America (Pohl et al., 2021).
- **Thematic curation:** Team briefing materials will come from the Museum KAA's archives. This mechanism will guarantee historical accuracy and uniformity of message across sites.
- **Economic spillover:** Local food vendors, guesthouses, and other micro-entrepreneurs could benefit from the spillover economic impact. People suggested that branded merchandise, such as posters or T-shirts, could create micro-sponsorship opportunities and connect the festival to Bandung's creative economy strategy (Novy & Colomb, 2019).
- **Community engagement:** Getting the schools and community associations to help maintain the murals and taking them on educational tours would engage the community members in the stewardship for the festival and further integrate it into the social fabric of Bandung.

Table 5. Festivalization Components and Benefits

Component	Description	Anticipated Benefit
Live Painting Zones	Three simultaneous mural sites along high-visibility corridors	Attracts daily spectators; media coverage
Curated Briefings	Historical workshops led by Museum KAA staff	Ensures conference themes are accurately represented
Local Vendor Stalls	Food, beverage, and craft booths adjacent to mural sites	Economic uplift for micro-entrepreneurs
Educational Tours	Guided walks for students and tourists	Deepens understanding; fosters school-to-community ties
Sponsorship Packages	Tiered sponsor levels (wall signage, event naming rights)	Private-public partnerships to underwrite festival costs

People who took part said that festivalization suits Bandung's broader creative economy strategy. They say cultural events are platforms for art and urban branding (Novy and Colomb, 2019). If the city made mural-making an annual civic ritual, it could sidestep lengthy permit negotiations by invoking special provisions for cultural events. Doing so would create systems for efficient administrative matters and at the same time engrain the narrative of the Asia–Africa Conference into the city's collective memory of Bandung. Thus, the model promises immediate gains in terms of tourism flows and, most importantly, the transformation of the public walls into a permanent heritage (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2022).

A local augmented reality developer's expert interview further explored the feasibility of digital enhancements. The specialists consulted confirmed that it was possible to produce simple augmented-reality (AR) overlays in two to four weeks, using current mural imagery as visual triggers. Projection mapping on the façade of Gedung Merdeka takes longer to prepare than a laser shows due to the need for coordination with heritage officers, but it could bring the archival conference alive in vivid visuals. This would happen during events slated for the evenings. Integrating QR codes into new murals was seen as an inexpensive and easy way to connect artwork to audio stories or interactive maps. The tools will create a layered, multisensory visitor experience where analog murals are enhanced by digital storytelling, thus increasing accessibility and engagement (Dieck et al., 2021; Chung et al., 2022).

Discussion

Integrating Findings into a Mural Diplomacy Framework

At the moment, Bandung is at a turning point. Four corridors with high visitor traffic, strong demand from visitors for street-level heritage narratives, a lively community of muralists, and access to digital tools combine to form a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. These assets stay underutilized because they are fragmented. To combat this, we propose to develop a Mural Diplomacy Framework that weaves all this together into a coherent strategy for heritage tourism and cultural diplomacy. The framework rests on three pillars, namely, place activation, festival catalyst, and digital storytelling, which are supported by a governance engine that will facilitate engagement among institutions, communities, and the municipality.

Place Activation is the first pillar. Here, the four corridors identified by GIS as ‘living galleries’. The murals tell the story of the Asian–African Conference of 1955. These themes include solidarity, decolonization, and after-conference themes. The Asia-Afrika Conference Museum and the City’s Department of Culture and Tourism would run open calls for local and international artists whose commissioned work would be both historical and aesthetically correct. A signboard and QR Codes in these urban murals could connect it to audiovisuals archives, converting a passerby into a learner (Buhalis & Amaranggana, 2015).

The second pillar, Festival Catalyst, calls for an annual Asia–Africa Mural Festival every November on the dates of the historic conference. Permits for festivals, issued under a new cultural-event provision, will avoid the multi-agency clearances. Activities such as live-painting performances, panel discussions, and school-based mural workshops would be useful to instill the past into public life. They would also create social cohesion and media visibility, as seen in other festival-led urban transformations (Novy & Colomb, 2019; Pohl et al., 2021). Collaborations with embassies from Asia and Africa may enhance diplomatic engagement and facilitate citizen-to-citizen connections.

Digital storytelling is the third pillar that uses new technologies to enrich engagement. Murals could come to life with animated archival footage, along with oral history through augmented-reality overlays. Conference visuals at Gedung Merdeka could engage audiences through projection mapping during evening history theaters. Digital Solidarity Badges could be awarded as visitors scan murals along gamified mobile trails to spread across all corridors and trigger online engagement (Dieck et al., 2021; Chung et al., 2022; Han et al., 2023). The Governance Engine will introduce a joint “Mural Council” which consists of five stakeholders from the Asia–Africa Conference Museum, Department of Culture and Tourism, Heritage Preservation Office, and local artist collectives to ensure sustainability. This council would ensure all government approvals for mural and festival permits with a single-window system. It would also track the results through yearly reports on footfall, social media reach, and visitor surveys to enable ongoing adaptation of the policy (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2022).

This combined strategy aligns with UNESCO’s encouragement of citizen-led cultural diplomacy. It aims for daily encounters in the urban environment to be seen as instances of heritage interpretation and acts of global solidarity (UNESCO, 2019; Kim, 2020). “If Bandung can carve Asia Afrika Street into an open-air classroom and intercultural gathering place, the wall can then become a non-physical soft power that turns the paint into power through unity”.

CONCLUSION

The study proves that politically themed murals present on Jalan Asia Afrika Bandung have a significant yet underutilized potential for heritage tourism and cultural diplomacy. Spatial mapping found four high-visibility corridors with one-way pedestrian flows exceeding 2,000

individuals/sqm/day. Further, the survey found that 35% of respondents consider street art their primary motivation to return to Bandung. Additionally, a significant 78 per cent expressed those murals give them a better emotional connection with the city's past, regardless of whether the murals have anything to do with the 1955 Asia–Africa Conference. According to these findings, political murals link archive histories with the mundane experiences of urban space.

In-depth interviews with curators and municipal officials revealed that the governance structure of mural painting is fragmented. The museum authority is limited to Gedung Merdeka. As a result, municipal departments classify murals as advertising. Thus, the museum cannot intervene when murals exceed a certain scale. Group talks with mural collectives showed excitement regarding festivalization. They see it as a way of spectacle for live-paintings. Most importantly, this festivalization is also for community cohesion and economic spillover. This is similar to what is happening in Medellín and Penang. After expert consultations, it appears entirely feasible to enhance the display of analog work with augmented reality, projection mapping, and audio clips linked to QR codes for an additional layer of interpretation. The study presents a Mural Diplomacy Framework as a solution with three components. Place Activation will link up key corridors. Next, it supports a Festival Catalyst. This will help tackle regulatory issues. Lastly, it proposes Digital Storytelling for historical engagement. Above all, a Governance Engine will oversee and manage the various curatorial (one being TRC), municipal, and community stakeholders. The integrated strategy could allow the Asia Afrika Street to be conceived as an open classroom and intercultural forum as part of citizens' cultural diplomacy, UNESCO recommended.

Nevertheless, this study acknowledges certain limitations. The fieldwork only took place in Bandung and was conducted over two months. As a result, this might not capture a long-term shift in behavior. Also, the online survey used convenience sampling, so the findings are limited to the surveyed population. Future work, then, could expand comparative studies across a range of postcolonial cities in Southeast Asia, use longitudinal visitor tracking, and develop an experimental digital installation to assess the long-term effects on heritage interpretation and cultural diplomacy. To conclude, through the proposed framework and the contents being developed, the narrative gap of the existing narrative can be filled. Not only that, Bandung can also be positioned as a regional leader in innovative heritage tourism. Supported by solid governance, community participation, and digital enhancement, political murals may become lasting tools for unity, intercultural dialogue, and collective memory.

Acknowledgments

This research was funded by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia under the PDP-BIMA 2025 scheme. The author expresses gratitude to Kemdiktisaintek on PDP-BIMA 2025 for providing funds for extensive fieldwork, consultations, and data analysis.

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